

Testimony of Dr. Leo E. Hanifin at Public Hearing regarding Senate Bills 909-912 to create Regional Transit Authority and funding mechanisms in Southeastern Michigan

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My name is Leo Hanifin and I would like to provide my enthusiastic support for these bills and brief comments on regional transit in Southeastern Michigan from four perspectives.

First, as the Dean of the College of Engineering and Science at the University of Detroit Mercy . . . it is critical that we attract and retain the technical talent that drives our technologically based economy. Last fall two new engineering grad students from Mexico attempted to take the bus from Royal Oak to the airport to meet a third new student's plane. It took them 3 hours! This year we hired a great new math professor, raised in Greece and did his PhD at UCLA . . . he decided to live in Oakland County and take the bus to UDM . . . after several failed attempts to travel from "SMART-land" to "DDOT-ville" he did the math and decided he couldn't afford the time and uncertainties involved, so now he rides with another faculty member. These people expected more, and these are just two of the thousands of examples of why our students and faculty need effective regional transit . . . and, more importantly, the world's brightest and best won't come to Detroit if they know we had a transit system that is third world quality at best.

Second, for the past six years I have been the Director of the Michigan Ohio University Transportation Center . . . a coalition of five universities funded by the US DOT and MDOT to do transportation research and education. We've done many transit related projects, and I personally led the team that developed the preliminary plan that has become M1 Rail . . . and I'm on the M1 Rail board. As a leader of transportation research I am absolutely certain that the step to create a RTA is the most essential step that we can take today. We must think regionally. While light rail can and should be part of the regional system, the creation of an effective system is more important than any component. Such decisions as bus or rail, side of street or center, or what fuels the vehicles should use are secondary to creating a coordinated system and should be left to the leaders of the RTA and the experts that they employ.

Third, the US DOT just selected and funded two National Transit Research Coalitions and, I am proud to tell you, UDM is part of one of them . . . and I am leading a team of eleven researchers and advisors from key transit organizations . . . people like Carmine Palombo of SEMCOG, John Hertel and John Swatosh of SMART, Tim Roseboom of DDOT and Megan Owens of TRU. This team is starting a twenty-month study of a wide variety of factors that enable and inhibit the development and operation of effective regional transit in SE MI. Factors like public opinion, funding, social issues and politics. We hope to contribute new understanding of the issues that have, more than twenty times over many decades, kept our region from developing an effective transit system. I pray that, two years from now, our findings will hold up the Detroit metropolitan area as an example of "how to do it right", not another case study in "what not to do."

Finally, as an active 65-year-old Dearborn resident, I hope to enjoy easy mobility for the next thirty years or so. I have traveled on transit systems across the nation and around the world, and I have experienced and studied the wonderful benefits of effective systems and seen the impact on the economic development and livability imparted by such systems.

It is time that all governmental and community leaders look past the trees of the detailed decisions of transit systems and saw the forest of the overall system and it's potential. We need regional cooperation, not the kind of polarization and gridlock that we're seen recently in Washington. We can do better. **We need this Regional Transit Authority here and we need it now!**

Thank you.

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and

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